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X and O

JEWEL MOGAN

Like when I missed my period, I'm going like Whaaa-t! and he goes Naw, you're just . . . you're not. Are you? So go get checked out. Where? I dunno. The Public Health Department? And then, Are you knocked up, really? Well, I mean, it's not that big a deal, is it? You messed up. No sweat. Only he's talking West Texas, Waaal, and real slow and all that, not like in California where I come from. Waaal, what did they tell you at the health department? Did you see one of themmm—counselors? I go Yeah. They get your name: O. Your age: 16. They don't tell you to do it or not do it. But they ask, like, Can you support the baby? Stuff like that.

And I tell him, it's all set up if I want it—. And then I go—I have to do something! I can't have it! I—we—can't have it! I'm saying this to X. And he goes Yeah, I know. And I go Yeah, you're right.

So we're all of a sudden in a panic to get it done. I want to do it today. I don't want another night of thinking about it, nightmares and all. Of course, they can't do it that quick. I sneak out of the house and telephone this clinic and make the appointment for Thursday, and feel better. Next day I cancel it without telling him. I can't. I can't. It's too terrible. It's a person, tiny as it is. It's on the way, coming at me in nightmares. But coming, for sure.

Jeeze, he was furious, you know, when he found out I canceled. He goes Why didn't we talk about it because by God he's involved too and it's his decision, too. So I go You really don't care. I screamed about him having his fun and now look, and just get rid of it, huh—it doesn't mean nothing. Act like it's a nothing! I'm a nothing! And like that. I mean, I sort of flipped out because I never have screamed at him and he had to close my mouth with his hand and throw me on the floor at his apartment. And I didn't care. Maybe that would make it come.

So then we got crazy and really tried to miscarry it. I went to a park by myself and jogged until I couldn't go anymore. I hung upside down on the monkey bars, did push-ups and sit-ups. He knew a girl who had a vibrator—I don't know how he knew this girl had this thing. I was too shook up to think about it, and he wanted to go borrow it from her and try this—dumb, just like a guy. But I go No, what will she think? It wouldn't work anyway. Nothing worked. No way was it going to let go.

And I was still kind of wanting it anyway, it was kind of a nice feeling having it inside of me. It was ours.

But it was like three things kept crashing through all my thoughts. The three things hadn't ever been connected before and now they were like jammed into one. Sex, pregnancy, abortion. Sex gets you pregnant and then you either have it or do away with it. Sex-pregnancy-abortion. It was like beating into my head in my nightmares and all day in school. I...it didn't help in the girls' bathroom either—I mean, I would go in there, like to barf, but I never could, and would sit and strain hoping it would break loose, and there were three stalls and fuck on the walls of each one—no matter what one you went in—fuck-fuck-fuck. Three stalls, three fucks.

I would sit and remember him throwing French fries in the air and catching them in his mouth. I worked about two months in a place called French Fry City, it wasn't just fries but burgers and stuff and he got lots of practice waiting for me to get off. And the easy way he slid in behind the wheel all in one move.

And we used to smooch at stop lights. Tight together in the front seat of this supercab pickup he had. You could tell his pickup anywhere in town. He worked in a sparkle shop and he had done it all over in purple and gold metal flake, chrome mag wheels, chrome 10-inch drop bumper, headache rack, and running boards. It looked like a boat. What else? Yeah, a chrome rollbar and a light-bar with four lights, two amber, two white; and a shotgun rack. Not another one like it, and besides that, he had this bumper sticker "Ask me if I give a shit." That was him. That truck was him and he was that truck.

He was wanting to get a lift kit and convert it into a monster, but he went Yeah, he would use that money if we needed it to get it done, and borrow on his paycheck. And I had a little birthday money in the bank. It looked like he was beginning to not want us to get married. Not now, not ever. Ever. Ever and Never. Forever and never. Those words ran around in my head, too. Words like Elsa Scott, our English teacher used. We used to get a really big yak out of her.

...Mr. Superslung. My girlfriend warned me he could kill you with his eyes. Watch you bleed. Like, he was drop-dead gorgeous. He still is. Really. But all that is gone. It was stupid anyway. It seems like it never happened.

So anyway.... Oh. I guess I wasn't sleeping, I wasn't eating except chips and Cokes. I would barely make it until I could get to a pay phone and call him. Then we wouldn't say anything. There would just be long silences and Well, what are we going to do, and like that, and he would get jumpy and go Well I have to go now, back to work.

But anyway, we decided to go ahead and do it. Did I say that yet? That was the last thing we decided, anyway. Yeah, I go, you're right.

I just went "home" sick from school one morning and he drove me to the clinic.

It was a weird scene. It wasn't like any experience I ever had (my girlfriend, the one who warned me about X, said the same thing, she had one too); and God willing I will never have it again, but like she said we were up against it and there wasn't any other way out.

Tell my mom? She had me. My grandmother had her.

It was a normal looking place, like an office; shrubs and little trees, those kind of trees in office parks that never get any bigger. There were these Jesus freaks standing around in a bunch. Don't pay them no mind he goes when he helped me down out of the supercab and he took my arm, like rough, and gave them the finger.

Then, Oh God, he got a big blob of pink bubble gum from the parking lot stuck on the heel of his boot. We had to stop while he scraped it off with his pocket knife. It didn't want to come off. He had to scrape and scrape. God, Oh God. Here now, hell, don't pitch a fit in the street. It got all over his knife. He had to clean his knife on the curb. C'mon baby. You're gonna be glad after it's over.

He wasn't even there after it was over. At the beginning of it I had my sheet telling all about it; X paid the fee; I signed three forms; he had to go in the waiting room; it was soft colors, dusty rose and soft blue, and beige; it was kind of rich-looking, with magazines and all, but it was like fakey. They gave me blood and urine tests; a pelvic—flat on your back with your feet in these stirrup-things, he was asking like did I have any favorite rock stars—with his fingers feeling for something. Then we went to get counseled and she asked if we had any problems with our decision and nobody said anything; she did all the talking, telling all of what they were going to do, more than I wanted to know; taking care of yourself afterwards; using contraceptives. They must have a hard time not acting bored, there were so many lined up, exact same stuff over and over. That's all they did in there. Then you put on the gown and the paper shoes and then a counselor goes in with you and holds your hand if you want; all the while they were playing this soft rock, and now in the operating room or whatever they call it, when you go in you notice it suddenly has burst out louder to cover screaming or whatever; but I had made up my mind I wasn't going to freak out and I didn't. I just held the lady's hand tight and tried to shut out that frigging music.

He wasn't even there when I got through. It was the most alone I have ever been. He had a reason I found out later but I was really

pissed and, you know, crying, when he wasn't there. He spun up in his brother's car like twenty minutes later. He started telling me all this stuff about moving the pickup. He was worrying about his pickup and that the Jesus freaks might damage it and all. How he moved it to the alley first, and then went back and drove it home and had to find his brother and borrow his brother's car, and I was hurting like hell and pissed off and then he said How'd it go? And I wanted to kill him or die myself.

No. I wanted it back. I go Give it back to me! I want it back!—It's funny, it's just like when I was nine my grandmother died, you know, the exact same thing, I screamed and yelled the same thing, I want her back! I want her back! They had to take me to her house, I made them take me to see for myself she wasn't there. And, same exact thing, I was empty inside and the whole earth seemed like a grave, and I burst out crying, and walked back and forth.

No, I was hobbling slow back and forth it hurt so bad and he stopped me from doing that and put me in his brother's car and took me to the apartment to rest until school was out and then I had to go home like nothing happened. Really. My brother was zapping zits in the bathroom when I got there and I couldn't get him out. Then I finally did and I changed the pad and went to bed for sixteen hours and I go Just a bad period, to my mom. I got a big picture of telling my mom Gee, Mom, guess what?— My friend couldn't tell her mom, either. I mean, your *mom*. She had you.

I always had nightmares all through this, every night I got a nightmare. Then one night I dreamed it came back and it was real, I mean a real baby for sure and it smiled at me and... like—it wasn't a girl or a boy, it was just baby—I can't explain, it was like love showing itself to me. Like, it's okay, you know?

And he went That don't make any sense. It's in your mind. It was a blob of jelly. And I went Yeah, you're right.

I still get crazy, especially since we have split up. I still feel like a nothing. But I don't get any more nightmares.